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KIRSHBAUM DEMLER & ASSOCIATES

American Repertory Theater,  
Chicago Opera Theater, and Opera Boston  
in coordination with MIT's FAST Arts Festival

PRESENT

# TOD MACHOVER'S DEATH AND THE POWERS

## The Robots' Opera



TECHNOLOGICALLY GROUNDBREAKING PRODUCTION  
TO PREMIERE IN BOSTON AND CHICAGO

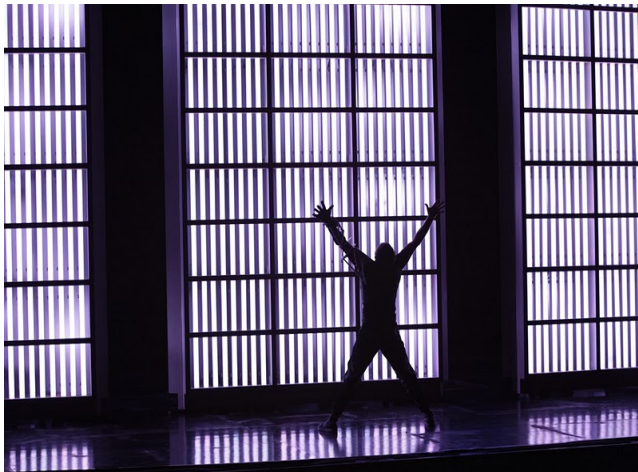


*When the eccentric patriarch Simon Powers departs his physical being and downloads himself into The System, his house assumes his immortal presence around his family and friends...*

So begins ***Death and the Powers***, a groundbreaking new opera created by **Tod Machover** and his Opera of the Future Group at the MIT Media Lab, which receives its **North American premieres March 18, 20, 22 and 25, 2011** with **Harvard's American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) and Opera Boston** in coordination with MIT's **FAST Arts Festival**; and **April 2, 6, 8 and 10, 2011**, at **Chicago Opera Theater**.

The September 24, 2010 world premiere of *Death and the Powers* at l'Opéra de Monte-Carlo was praised by audiences and critics alike. *Opera* magazine's Andrew Porter wrote, "Machover is a remarkable composer. [His] technological inventions in giving to sounds, through electronics, new sonorities, new eloquence, have been widely and amply acclaimed. But I'd like to stress what a good opera composer he is, bringing the 'traditional', necessary skills to a far from traditional work. Machover has a command of expressive vocal gesture. This was a grand, rich, deeply serious new opera, presented by a team with manifold coherent accomplishments."

The libretto for *Death and the Powers* is written by former U.S. Poet Laureate **Robert Pinsky** from a story by Pinsky and **Randy Weiner** and directed by **Diane Paulus**, who is renowned for her talent in delivering adventurous productions through audience participation devices, exemplified in her recent revival of *HAIR* on Broadway. Ms. Paulus is joined by her chosen choreographer **Karole Armitage** who has a knack for creating eye-catching, quirky rhythmic movement which is communicated effectively by the human characters as well as the robot chorus. Production designer **Alex McDowell** rounds out the team, best known as the creative director behind such films as *Minority Report* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The music is performed by the **Boston Modern Orchestra Project**, conducted by **Gil Rose**.



*Death and the Powers* is a one-act, full evening work which tells the story of Simon Powers, a rich, successful inventor, who wishes to perpetuate his existence beyond the decay of his physical being. Reaching the end of his life, Powers uses his vast resources and devises a way to 'download' himself into his environment. This transformation turns every object in his surroundings—such as his books, furniture and walls—into a collective, living version of himself, called **The System**. His family, friends and business associates are left to explore how this transformation impacts their relationships and ability to move forward with their own lives and legacies. Machover elegantly blends his technological and artistic expertise to create an inventive score filled with arching melodic lines, richly nuanced textures and propulsive rhythms. Additionally, *Death and the Powers* introduces specially-designed technology and an animated set—including a chorus of robots and a musical chandelier—assuredly launching a new era in opera production and expression.

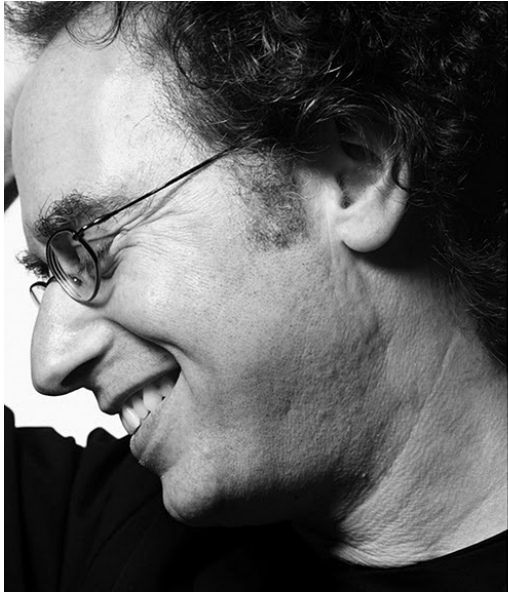
Developed by Machover's Opera of the Future Group at the MIT Media Lab, *Death and the Powers* sets itself apart from other operas with pioneering performance technologies. The stage is a vast, interconnected, intelligent 'System' of Powers' continuing presence. As the opera progresses, the set 'comes alive' with Simon's thoughts, feelings and memories through a new technique called **Disembodied Performance** which uses innovative sensors and analysis software to translate James Maddalena's sounds and gestures into the behavior of the set. The customized audio system boasts 143 separate speakers which allows for a 'mini' surround sound system in each of the boxes and balconies. In coordination with his first-rate production team, Machover actively participates in the performance from his seat in the opera house. Working with a customized iPad, Machover literally keeps technology at his fingertips -- allowing him to make subtle electronic, robotic and acoustic changes throughout the opera so as to further enhance and refine all aspects of the live concert experience.

In addition to the animatronic set, the opera employs several other inventions developed especially for the production including: a chorus of 'Operabots' which narrate and react to the story; and a spectacular musical Chandelier, comprised of long Teflon strings which resonate through remotely actuated electromagnets as well as on-stage performers plucking, strumming and dampening the strings.



*Death and the Powers'* cast features baritone **James Maddalena** as Simon Powers; soprano **Emily Albrink** as Simon's third wife, Evvy; soprano **Sara Heaton** as Simon's daughter, Miranda; tenor **Hal Czalet** as Simon's research assistant and adopted son, Nicholas; countertenor **Doug Dodson** as 'The United Way'; baritone **David Kravitz** as 'The United Nations'; and bass **Tom McNichols** as 'The Administration.'

***Generous support for Death and the Powers has been provided by the Monaco-based Futurum Association.***



### **Tod Machover**

Whether it is creating genre-breaking compositions for the concert hall, “robotic” operas for worldwide stages, software that allows anyone to compose original music, or musical activities that can diagnose illness and restore health, **Tod Machover**’s unique vision is shaping the future of music. Machover is widely known for creating music that breaks traditional artistic and cultural boundaries, as well as for developing trailblazing inventions for music performance. He is Professor of Music and Media and Director of the Opera of the Future Group at the MIT Media Lab, and is also Visiting Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Machover’s music has been commissioned and performed

by many of the world’s most important performers and ensembles and has received numerous international prizes and awards, including the “Chevalier des Arts et Lettres” from the French Culture Ministry. Machover has designed new music technologies—such as Hyperinstruments—for some of the world’s greatest virtuosi, from Yo-Yo Ma to Prince, but also for young people, families, seniors, and the disabled. The popular videogames *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* grew out of this Hyperinstruments work in Machover’s Lab. His Hyperscore software—which allows anyone to compose original music using lines and colors—has allowed children around the world to have their music performed by major orchestras as part of Machover’s Toy Symphony project. This technology is increasingly used by people of all ages in cultural, educational and medical contexts. Machover is also noted for his visionary operas, including *VALIS* (based on Philip K. Dick’s sci-fi classic), *The Brain Opera* (which invites the audience to collaborate live and online, and has been installed since 2000 at Vienna’s House of Music), and *Skellig*, which premiered in the UK in November 2008 to rave reviews. He is currently working on a new piece for the Kronos Quartet celebrating the life and work of Noam Chomsky, and is starting on his next opera. **To read Tod Machover’s full biography, click [here](#).**

### **MIT Media Lab and the Opera of the Future Group**

The MIT Media Lab applies an unorthodox research approach to envision the impact of emerging technologies on everyday life—technologies that promise to fundamentally transform our most basic notions of human capabilities. The Lab’s Opera of the Future Group – founded and directed by Tod Machover – explores concepts and techniques to help advance the future of musical composition, performance, learning and expression, with a particular focus on opera. The scope of research includes musical instrument design, concepts for new performance spaces, interactive touring, permanent installations, musical toys, and some very unusual operas. Through the design of new interfaces for both professional virtuosi and amateur music-lovers, the development of new techniques for interpreting and mapping expressive gesture, and the application of these technologies to innovative

compositions and experiences, the Opera of the Future Group seeks to enhance music as a performance art, and to develop its transformative power as counterpoint to our everyday lives. **To learn more about the MIT Media Lab, click [here](#).** **To learn more about the Opera of the Future Group, click [here](#).**

### **Robert Pinsky**

Robert Pinsky is widely considered to be one of America's greatest writers, and has received numerous international awards and consistently been on international best-seller lists. He served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1997 to 2000, and is currently poetry editor of *Slate*, a contributor to *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer* on PBS and a professor in the graduate writing program at Boston University. He is the author of six books of poetry, several volumes of essays, and numerous edited anthologies. Pinsky's book *The Inferno of Dante*, a new verse translation, was awarded the "Los Angeles Times Book Award" in poetry and the "Howard Morton Landon Prize" for translation. **To learn more about Robert Pinsky, click [here](#).**

### **Randy Weiner**

Randy Weiner is a writer/director whose projects span theater, film, and television. He has been commissioned by such organizations as the Music-Theatre Group in New York City and the Ambassador Theater Group in London. Weiner co-wrote *Club 12*, a hip-hop version of "Twelfth Night," featuring Grammy Award-winning singers Lauryn Hill and Wyclef Jean, presented by the Shubert Organization. He has written music-based film and television projects for MTV, FOX, HBO, Quincy Jones Entertainment and Warner Brothers. In addition, Weiner founded [Fan2Fan.com](#), one of today's leading music marketing companies. He is also co-founder and managing director of The Box theater club in New York. **To learn more about Randy Weiner, click [here](#).**

### **Diane Paulus**

Diane Paulus is a director of opera and theater, and since fall 2009 has been Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.). Her recent theater work includes The Public Theater's revival of *Hair* at the Delacorte in Central Park, now transferred to Broadway (nominated for 8 Tony Awards including Best Director, as well as winner of a Drama Desk Award, Outer Critics Circle Award and Drama League Award for Best Revival of a Musical). As an opera director, her productions include *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Turn Of The Screw*, *Così fan tutte*, and all three Monteverdi operas, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, and *Orfeo* at the Chicago Opera Theater. **To learn more about Diane Paulus, click [here](#).**

### **Alex McDowell**

McDowell has served as production designer for such films as *Fight Club*, *Minority Report*, *The Terminal*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Corpse Bride*. For *Minority Report*, McDowell established the first fully integrated digital design department in the film industry, enabling the strands of 2D and 3D design, set construction, camera, prop manufacturing and post-production VFX to be efficiently linked and managed by the Design Team. McDowell is the founder of the

revolutionary design and engineering think tank known as ‘matter,’ and is co-founder of the 5D Conference of Immersive Design. *Death and the Powers* is his first opera project. **To learn more about Alex McDowell, click [here](#).**

### **Karole Armitage**

Karole Armitage began her professional career in 1973 as a member of the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève, Switzerland, followed by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. She is Artistic Director of Armitage Gone! Dance, which was launched in 2005. She has created dances for numerous companies throughout Europe and America, directed operas from the baroque and contemporary repertoire for many of the prestigious houses of Europe, and choreographed videos for pop icons Madonna and Michael Jackson and the filmmakers Merchant and Ivory. Armitage’s choreography was first seen on Broadway in the musical *Passing Strange*, followed by *Hair*, for which she garnered a Tony nomination for choreography. **To learn more about Karole Armitage, click [here](#).**

## ***DEATH AND THE POWERS***

**Tod Machover**, Composer/Creative Director

**Robert Pinsky**, Librettist

**Randy Weiner and Robert Pinsky**, Story

**Diane Paulus**, Director

**Gil Rose**, Conductor

**Alex McDowell**, Production Designer

**Karole Armitage**, Choreographer

**Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP)**, orchestra

*New Performance Technologies by MIT Media Lab*

### **Cast**

James Maddalena, baritone: **Simon Powers**

Emily Albrink, soprano: **Evy**

Sara Heaton, soprano: **Miranda**

Hal Cazalet, tenor: **Nicholas**

Doug Dodson, countertenor: **The United Way**

David Kravitz, baritone: **The United Nations**

Tom McNichols, bass: **The Administration**

### **Instrumentation:**

3 Winds

4 Brass

1 Percussion

2 Keyboards (with electronics)

5 Strings

### **UNITED STATES PREMIERE - BOSTON**

American Repertory Theater and Opera Boston – Cutler Majestic Theater

*Presented as part of the FAST Arts Festival in celebration of MIT’s 150th*

*Anniversary [site](#)*

Friday, March 18, 2011 at 7:30pm  
Sunday, March 20, 2011 at 3:00pm  
Tuesday, March 22, 2011 at 7:30pm  
Friday, March 25, 2011 at 7:30pm

*Additional information available at American Repertory Theater's [Death and the Powers site](#)*

## **MIDWEST PREMIERE - CHICAGO**

Chicago Opera Theater  
Harris Theater at Millennium Park

Saturday, April 2, 2011 at 7:30pm  
Wednesday, April 6, 2011 at 7:30pm  
Friday, April 8, 2011 at 7:30pm  
Sunday, April 10, 2011 at 3:00pm

*Additional information available at Chicago Opera Theater's [Death and the Powers site](#)*

## ***MEDIA LINKS***

**Death and the Powers [website](#)**  
**Death and the Powers [music sample](#)**  
**Tod Machover [website](#)**  
**Opera of the Future [blog](#)**  
**Opera of the Future [twitter](#)**  
**Opera of the Future [facebook](#)**

***For press inquiries, please contact Kirshbaum Demler & Associates: 212-222-4843 | [info@kirshdem.com](mailto:info@kirshdem.com)***